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THE FOX SISTERS: RIDDLE OF THE RECORDS

By

Lis J. Warwood

The exact ages of the Fox sisters has long been debated, with various conflicting possibilities put forward by members of the Fox family, others who claimed to know them, as well as biographers, researchers and historians . This article provides a brief review of the conflicting records, and evaluates them in the context of available census information.

Margaretta Fox, daughter of John D Fox and Margaret Smith, died on March 8, 1893. Two days later The New York Times reported:

*“Margaret Fox Kane, the youngest of the once celebrated Fox sisters, through whose agency the ‘Rochester rappings’ were developed, died early Wednesday morning at the house of Mrs Emily B Ruggles, 492 State Street, Brooklyn. Funeral services will be conducted to-night in Bradbury Hall, 292 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, at 8 o’clock, by Titus Merritt of this city, one of Mrs Kane’s oldest friends.”*¹

Margaretta Fox was not the youngest of the Fox sisters; that honour, if it be one, belonged to Catharine Fox. She had died the year before, on the afternoon of July 2, 1892 at her home at 609 Columbia Avenue, New York. The following day one newspaper related that her death had resulted from:

“a complication of kidney and heart troubles..... Mrs. Jencken had been sick for nearly a week.” The paper noted *“she was famous years ago in Spiritualist circles”,* and *“at an early age she and her sister Margaret attracted attention as mediums...”*²

Notably missing from the reports of Margaretta and Catharine’s deaths was any mention of their age. However, an article published in the Washington Daily Star, on March 7, 1893, the day before Margaretta’s death, describes her as “a woman nearly 60 years of age”, though in this report she is said to be inhabiting one room in an otherwise deserted tenement house at 456 West 57th Street, New York.

When Margaretta died, her body was placed for a year in a receiving vault at Greenwood cemetery. Later, Joseph La Fumee, who had first met the Fox sisters in New York in 1850, offered to have the remains of Margaretta and Catharine placed in his plot at Cypress Hill cemetery.³ The tomb stone records a birth date of Oct. 7, 1833, for Margaretta and March 27, 1837, for Catharine. The dates were provided by Titus Merritt, friend and confidante of Margaretta Fox.⁴

Today, the inscriptions on the Fox sister’s grave markers are all but worn away, and the burial site is sadly neglected.

Merritt claimed that it was Maggie herself, who had provided him with her own, and Kate’s dates of birth. Based on Merritt’s information, Maggie Fox was 59 years and 5 months old when she passed to spirit and Kate 55 years 3 months and 5 days on her demise almost nine months earlier.

¹ The New York Times March 10th 1893

² The New York Times July 3rd 1892

³ Hydesville in History by M. E. Cadwallader, The Progressive Thinker Publishing House, 1917, Birth, Demise and Interment of the Justly Celebrated Fox Family, as Reported by Titus Merritt Page 29

⁴ A copy of a statement signed by Merritt, dated May 7, 1896 confirming the dates is found in R. G. Pressing, ‘Rappings that Startled the World – Facts About the Fox Sisters’, 1948 page 90. See Pspioneer page 193: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.8August08..pdf>

If this is correct, on Friday night March 31st, 1848 in the tiny hamlet of Hydesville in New York State, Margaretta Fox was 14 years and 5 months old, while Catharine Fox had turned 11 just five days earlier.

Four and a half years before her death, on Oct 21, 1888, Margaretta had stood before a large assembly gathered in the New York Academy of Music, in the presence of her sister Catharine for the purpose of repudiating their ‘powers’ as a fake, and confessing that Spiritualism was “an absolute falsehood from beginning to end....”⁵ In defence of their claimed fraudulent actions at Hydesville, she and Catharine suggested that they were but “small children so simple and innocent” that they could hardly be expected to have had “even the shade of a realization of the real meaning of this deception.”⁶

In an apparently heartfelt manner, Margaretta Fox professed that after so many years of deceit, she was “now prepared to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth...”⁷ and shortly after, in what was claimed as a true account of the origin of Spiritualism,⁸ Margaretta is recorded as born in 1840, and Catharine one and a half years later, while Ann Leah, the eldest Fox daughter, had been born some twenty-three years before Margaretta.

If this ‘true account’ has credence, then on March 31st 1848 Margaretta Fox was just 8 years old, young Catharine a mere 6 and a half, and Ann Leah, their sister, then residing in the town of Rochester some 30 miles from Hydesville, about 31 years old, and therefore born around 1817. The statement made in 1888 clearly contradicts the information provided by Merritt.

In 1886, Mrs Margaret Fox Kane, as she was generally known, wrote to the Rochester ‘Union’ in response to an article headed ‘The Rochester Rappings: The Fox Sisters and the Beginning of Spiritualism.’ Her letter, reprinted in ‘The New York Times’, was to ‘correct’ a number of statements in the article, which had reported her as “12 years old, and Kate, 9 years old”⁹ in 1848.

*“In the article published in The New York Times of Sunday, the 18th, and copied from the Rochester Union of April the 13th, it is stated that I am residing in Brooklyn, and that my sister, Mrs Kate Fox Jencken, is in Europe. Both statements are incorrect, as are also the ages given of Mrs Jencken (Kate Fox) and myself at the time the rappings were first heard. When Spiritualism first originated at Hydesville, Wayne County, in 1848, we were little children, and have no recollection of the events said to have occurred at that early period.”*¹⁰

⁵ Statement of Margaretta Fox Kane, quoted in ‘The Deathblow to Spiritualism, R. B. Davenport, 1888 at page 76.

⁶ Ibid. ‘Deathblow to Spiritualism, R. B. Davenport, 1888, at page 89.

⁷Op. cit. at page 76.

⁸ ‘The Deathblow to Spiritualism’

⁹ The New York Times April 18th 1886

¹⁰ The New York Times April 29th 1886

Margaretta's correspondence is of interest for several reasons. It is the first time, one of the Fox sisters can be found referring to themselves as "little children" but, perhaps even more significant is that less than three years before declaring the rappings at Hydesville to be a fraud, she is claiming neither she or Kate have any "recollection of the events said to have occurred" at that time.

The ages of 12 and 9, disputed by Margaretta in 1886 were just one of a number of different possibilities recorded over the previous 38 years. The first put forward were in E. E. Lewis's booklet¹¹ published a few weeks after the events at Hydesville. In it a signed statement made on April 11th 1848, Mrs Margaret Fox detailed her recollection of the events in her home 12 days earlier. In passing, she records that her youngest daughter was "about 12", and the other girl was "in her 15th year".¹²

Evidence in support of these stated ages can be found in the correspondence of Isaac and Amy Post, important Quaker and abolitionist figures of the time. The Post's were "well acquainted" with the Fox family. In a letter to his brother and sister-in-law, Isaac Post commented that Kate and Margaret Fox were: "*Girls of 12 and 14 years who used to live in our house at Cornhill and with whom we always had good understanding.*"¹³

By mid 1848, Margaretta and Catharine Fox were staying with their sister, Ann Leah Fox Fish in Rochester. In other correspondence, Isaac Post reported that within days after Kate and Margaret had arrived from Hydesville, they had visited the Post's and demonstrated for them the rappings. As a result, Isaac and Amy Post became great supporters of the Fox sisters, and gathered together a small group to meet weekly to communicate "with the dead through the girl's mediumship."¹⁴

This couple who had known the Fox family prior to the events at Hydesville, had renewed that acquaintance shortly after, and subsequently maintained a close relationship for a number of years, seemed certain how old Margaretta and Catharine Fox were in 1848.

On August 29, 1850, M G Warner, Assistant Marshal, recorded the free inhabitants of Rochester 3rd Ward, as part of the National Census.¹⁵

¹¹ 'A Report of the Mysterious Noises, Heard in the House of Mr John D Fox, in Hydesville, Arcadia, Wayne County', E. E. Lewis, 1848. The full report is published in Psypioneer April 2005 see: - http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP12.pdf

¹² Ibid., at page 4.

¹³ Letters of Isaac and Amy Post, quoted in 'Radical Spirits', Ann Braude, at page 10-11.

¹⁴ Ibid., at page 11.

¹⁵ 1850 Census: Dwelling House 375; Family 457. Rochester 3rd Ward. Dwelling 375, Family 456.

Ann L Fish	29		N York
Margaretta Fox	16		Canada
Catharine Fox	14		“
Alfa Annis	20		Holland
Calvin R Brown	29	Confectioner	N York
Margaret Fox	52		N. York

The 1850 census occurred just two years and 5 months after the happenings in Hydesville.

It is evident that at sixteen and fourteen, the Fox sister's ages correspond well with their mother's 1848 statement of 'about twelve' and 'in her 15th year.' That the age of Ann Leah Fox, who had married Bowman Fish in 1829, was recorded as twenty-nine, presents more of a difficulty, as it suggests a birth year of 1821.

There seems little doubt however that Ann Leah Fox was born in 1813,¹⁶ though many writers have subsequently suggested 1814. By March 1848, Ann Leah was 34 or 35, and by 1850 in her 37th year.

The presence in her household in 1850 of 29 year old Calvin Brown, whom Ann Leah was to marry a few months later, might, however, provide an explanation for the apparent discrepancy in her age. Ann Leah would not be the first, nor the last, woman to lie about her age when about to marry a younger man.

In 1850, the inhabitants of the Town of Arcadia, Wayne County, in the state of New York, were not enumerated until October 18th, by Assistant Marshal C Mason.¹⁷ Mrs Fox and her daughters were recorded for a second time, now shown as residing in Arcadia.

John D Fox	61	Blacksmith	b. New York
Margaret Fox	53		b. New York
Margaretta Fox	16		b. Canada
Catharina Fox	14		b. Canada

The apparent anomaly of the same people being recorded in two different places in the same census is not at all uncommon. More often than not, it is due to the head of household including in the census documents members of the family who are *usually* present, even though on the actual census day, they are residing elsewhere.

The most significant factor is that Margaretta and Catharine are recorded as 16 and 14 in both.¹⁸

¹⁶ "Leah was baptized Ann Leah on April 8, 1813, in the Kakiat Reformed Church in West New Hempstead, Rockland Country." Leah's baptismal date is from "Kakiat Records" See page 32 in Barbara Weisberg's, "Talking to the Dead: Kate & Maggie Fox & The Rise of Spiritualism", HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.

¹⁷ 1850 Census: Arcadia. Wayne County, N. Y. Page 242, Folio 483, Dwelling 1765, Family 1856.

¹⁸ Extensive experience as a genealogist and family historian over the past 10 years has taught the author that the likely accuracy of children's ages in census records is highest when children are under

The census taken ten years earlier, though it contains only limited information, is also worth a brief mention. In 1840 John D Fox is found in Rochester, New York, as head of the family, being between 50 and 60 years of age, while in the household are also a female 50 to 60, and two female children both recorded as being “under 5”.¹⁹

Though the two female children are not named, it is reasonable to posit that they are Maggie and Kate. John and Margaret Fox’s other children, Ann Leah, Elizabeth, Maria and David, had all been born between 1813 and 1820 and by 1840 were no longer living at home.

In 1855 Eliab Wilkinson Capron, who had the honour of speaking at the first public demonstration held in Corinthian Hall, New York in November 1849, offered his record of the early years of Spiritualism.²⁰ Though his book introduces some minor changes in the Hydesville story, the girl’s ages are again recorded as around 12 and 15.

The first inkling of uncertainty about the ages is found in a letter to the Editor of the New York Times, in August 1858, when one of Maggie Fox’s supporters wrote:

*“Miss Margaretta Fox renounced Spiritualism and separated herself from all association with Spiritualists five years ago, when she was but sixteen years of age.”*²¹

Suggesting that Maggie was just sixteen in 1853 indicates she was 10 or 11 years old in 1848. The article further relates that Maggie had ceased her involvement with Spiritualism as a result of:

*“ the request of a friend, whose wishes were sacred to her, and her promise never in any way whatever, to have aught to do with Spiritualism, was religiously kept, even after the death of this friend.”*²²

There is little doubt that the ‘friend’ was Elisha Kent Kane, Arctic explorer, whom Margaretta Fox had met in 1852. In the summer of 1858, a year and a half after the death of Kane, Margaretta sought to obtain from his family her ‘inheritance’; a sum of some \$5,000, which she and others believed Kane had left provision for in his will.²³

twenty and residing with their parents who generally provide the enumerator with information about the family members and their ages. The level of accuracy with adults in the census information can be consistent over a large number of different census years, or be wildly varying and inconsistent. Such inconsistencies are generally accounted for by illiteracy on the part of the informant or due to deliberate falsification for reasons unknown.

¹⁹ 1840 Census. N.B. Reference details unavailable in copy of census page held by the author.

²⁰ ‘Modern Spiritualism: Its Facts and Fanaticisms, its Consistencies and Contradictions’, E W Capron, 1855

²¹ The New York Times, 18 August 1858, ‘Miss Fox & the Spirit Rappers’, un-named writer.

²² Ibid.,

²³ ‘Raising Kane: The Making of a Hero, The Marketing of a Celebrity’, Mark Horst Sawin, The University of Texas at Austin, August 1997, at page 70.

She claimed to have married Kane in a clandestine ceremony, shortly before he departed for England on October 11, 1856.

Around the same time Maggie gave the many letters written to her by Kane to a publisher while La Fumee, a journalist with the Brooklyn *Eagle*, helped her “write up a narrative to connect the letters.”²⁴ It was not, however, until 1866, that ‘The Love-Life of Dr Kane’ was finally published. In it Maggie Fox claims she was thirteen when she first met Kane. He was undoubtedly 32 at the time. It is hard to conceive of a man of the world in his early thirties entering into a ‘liaison’ with a thirteen year old.

If born in 1833, however, as Merritt stated, Maggie was actually nineteen.²⁵ Maggie’s version, if it were true, suggests she was 8 or 9 in 1848, a view that seems to reflect the claims she made later in 1888.

Yet in 1860, Owen records a meeting in August 1859 with Mrs Fox, daughters Margaretta and Catharine, and their brother David S Fox, who, he claims, provided him with a new narrative of the events of March 31, 1848 including a statement that at the time Maggie was “twelve years old; and Kate, nine.”²⁶

The information found in the 1860 census once again proves most interesting.²⁷

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Value of Personal Property	Place of Birth
J D Fox	70	M	Farmer	2000	N. Y.
Margaret “	63	F			N. Y.
Margaret “	23	F			Canada
Catharine “	21	F			Canada

John Fox was also recorded on the 1860 census in the Township of Arcadia.²⁸

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Value of Personal Property	Place of Birth
John D Fox	71	M	Farmer	500	N. Y.

Mrs Fox and her daughters had moved to New York during the 1850’s. The duplicate census records suggest that John Fox was visiting his wife and daughters in June 1860 though he continued to normally reside in Arcadia.

²⁴ Ibid., at page 71. Quoting Miriam Buckner Pond, *Time is Kind*, p. 219; See also undated & unsigned letter in Elisha Kent Kane collection, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

²⁵ Ibid., at page 72.

²⁶ Robert Dale Owen, *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, J. B. Lippincott & Co. Philadelphia, 1860, at page 285.

²⁷ 1860 Census: 1st Division, 19th Ward, New York City. Page 208. Dwelling 816, Family 1603. Enumerated on June 25th by Stephen M Iren.

²⁸ 1860 Census: Arcadia, Wayne County. Dwelling 1,131, Family 1,119. Enumerated by P Tucker.

In referring to the census data, it is important to note that the information recorded by the enumerators is only as accurate as the honesty of the informant. In evaluating the 1860 census information showing Maggie as 23 and Kate as 21, it seems to reflect the revised information apparently provided to Owen by the Fox family just a few months earlier.

The ages recorded in 1860 suggest years of birth of 1837 and 1839 indicating that in March 1848 Maggie had been 11 (in her 12th year) and Kate 9. How much credence can be placed on the 1860 census given the 1850 data is a matter for debate.

Just ten years later, Emma Hardinge, in 'Modern American Spiritualism', at first wrote:

*"At the time of the manifestations, the house was tenanted by Mr. and Mrs. Fox and their two youngest children, Margaret and Catharine, the respective ages of whom Mrs Fox's published statement represents as twelve and fifteen years."*²⁹

In the final pages of her work, however, Hardinge offers a correction:

*" Since the earlier chapters of this volume were in type, the author has been requested to correct the statement made by the witnesses at Hydesville, respecting the ages of Catherine and Margaretta Fox at the time of the first disturbances. The mother of the ladies, Mrs Fox, addressed a letter to the President of the anniversary meeting held in New York City in 1868, in which she stated that, at the time of the first 'Rochester knockings,' her daughter Kate was seven years old, and Margaretta ten. The ages of the children being as the family allege, 'incorrectly rendered in the first printed report, have been erroneously represented in all subsequent accounts."*³⁰

Emma Hardinge's 'errata' statement is perhaps the most puzzling of all made regarding the ages of Maggie and Kate Fox, for in March 1868 when it is claimed Mrs Margaret Fox had written, she had been deceased some 2 years and seven months, having passed into spirit at the age of 68, on August 3rd 1865 as a result of typhoid fever. She was laid to rest in Greenwood Cemetery, in Brooklyn, New York.³¹

It appears that in 1870, *someone*, though presumably not Mrs Fox (unless her missive arrived from beyond the veil of death) wanted to establish new ages for Kate and Maggie; ones that contradicted those recorded in 1848 through to 1860.

Perhaps the ages recorded for Maggie and Kate, in the National Census of 1870, would shed light on the matter. Sadly, to date neither has been found in the 1870 or the later American census records, though the search continues.

²⁹ Emma Hardinge, 'Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record', NY, 1870 at page 29

³⁰ Ibid., at page 563. (It should be noted that not all editions of MAS contain this statement see Psypioneer page 167: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.7July08..pdf>)

³¹ M. E. Cadwallader, 'Hydesville in History', The progressive Thinker Publishing House, 1917, 'Birth, Demise & Interment of the Justly Celebrated Fox Family', as reported by Titus Merritt, at page 29.

Kate is, however, recorded in the 1881 English census. On Dec. 14, 1872, she had married Henry Diedrich Jencken.³² Born around 1824 in then small village of Peckham in Surrey, England, Jencken was a Barrister. In 1881 Henry, Catharine and their two children were residing in St James Square, Kensington.³³

Name	Status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Henry D Jencken	Head	57	Barrister	b. Surrey Peckham
Catherine “	Wife	37		b. United States
Ferdinand L “	Son	7		b. Brompton Mdx
Henry D L “	Son	6		b. New York U.S.

For Catharine Fox Jencken to be 37 in 1881 requires a birth year of 1843 or 1844. Were this true, she would have been just 4 or 5 in March 1848!

It would be remiss not to also take a closer look at Ann Leah Fox. In her 1885 account “of the initiation of the movement known as Modern Spiritualism”³⁴ she wrote:

*“Starting from three sisters, two of them children, and the eldest a little beyond that age, clustered round a matchless mother.....”*³⁵

That Ann Leah should suggest she was little more than a child herself in 1848 stretches the bounds of reality too far. The propensity for Ann Leah Fox to distort the truth about her age is also evident in the census records. In 1850 in the census she claimed to be 29 when at least 36. On November 2, 1858, Ann Leah married for a third time to Daniel Underhill. Underhill was born in 1821. The 1860 census shows Daniel and Ann Leah Fox Underhill residing in New York City.³⁶

Daniel Underhill	38	M	Seely Insurance Co.		Dist. Columbia
Ann Leah	34	F			N. Y.
Ann	6	F			N. Y.
Lise Fish	23	F			N. Y.
Susan Prophy	35	F	Servant		Ireland
Johanna Welsh	20	F	Servant		Ireland

Given Underhill’s year of birth, the census correctly reflects that he would be 38 or 39 in 1860, depending on the month of his birth. Ann Leah, however, somewhat amazingly shown as 34, has apparently only aged five years in the ten since the previous census was taken. Ann Leah was actually 46 or 47 in 1860.

³² GRO Marriages December Quarter 1872 Marylebone Vol 1a Page 972.

³³ 1881 UK Census: RG 11/31 Folio 135 Page 9, HSN 265, ED 30b. Address: 16 St James Square, Kensington, Middlesex.

³⁴ Ann Leah Fox Underhill, ‘The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism’ at page 1.

³⁵ Ibid., at page 1-2.

³⁶ 1860 Census: 5th Division 20th Ward New York City. Dwelling 242, Family 778. Enumerated July 5th by Assistant Marshal Boppert (initial’s illegible).

The age discrepancy in the 1870 census is even more extreme.³⁷

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Value of real Estate Owned Real Personal	Place of Birth
Underhill Dan'l	45	M	President Ins.	61,000 10,000	N. Y.
“ Leah	40	F			N. Y.
“ Lillie	15 ^{4.}	F			N. Y.
Fox Frank	18	M			N. Y.
Blauwell Lizzie	26	F			N. Y.
Kerr Mary A	25	F	Domestic Serv't.		Ireland
Gallagher Sabina	22	F	Domestic Serv't		Ireland

Having again apparently aged only 6 years since 1860, shown now as 40 years old, the age recorded is incorrect by some 17 years. In 1870, Ann Leah Fox Underhill was in the 57th year of her life.

The search for her in the 1880 and 1890 census continues. She died November 1st 1890 in New York City when 77 years old.

At present the census information that has been gathered represents an incomplete record of the years covering 1840 to 1890. Nevertheless, the census data that is available provides significant new insight into the probable ages of the Fox sisters in 1848.

The 1840 census effectively puts to rest the claim by Maggie and Kate in 1888, that they were young and innocent children of 8 and 6 and a half in March 1848. That much, at least, of their claimed 'true account' must be discarded.

The 1850 census, which twice records them as 14 and 16, is perhaps the strongest evidence available supporting the veracity of Mrs Margaret Fox's statement of April 1848.

Clearly, the most significant distortion of the truth about how old they were in 1848 was perpetrated by the sisters themselves, and not only in their confession in 1888. We may never be able to uncover why they lied about something which Merritt suggested was a matter "*of minor importance as compared with the phenomena produced through their instrumentality*", but that they lied cannot be doubted.

³⁷ 1870 Census: 21st District, 20th Ward, New York City. Dwelling 66, Family 153. Enumerated July 6th by Assistant Marshal, Geo. Woodward.

HYDESVILLE TEXT REPRINTED

Kessinger³⁸ have reprinted a seminal work which could be said to first express Modern Spiritualism both phenomenally and philosophically.

Another copy of the same book has been used by Google Books to also make the full text available³⁹.

“Explanation and History of the Mysterious Communion with Spirits comprehending the rise and progress of the Mysterious Noises” was compiled by Henry D. Barron and Eliab. W. Capron, and published in Auburn, New York in 1850. It is the second edition, revised and enlarged, that Kessinger have reprinted in their usual photocopying style; Google has used the same edition.

In her standard biography of the Fox sisters “Talking to the Dead”, Barbara Weisberg has called attention to the significance of this work. (p.91-4). It was, she suggests, the first substantive one since E.E. Lewis.

The pamphlet is notable in that it gives a historical pedigree to the phenomena, via the Wesley poltergeist. Moreover:

“To explain the presence of such communicative and humanlike spirits, Capron and Barron drew primarily on the ideas of their contemporary Andrew Jackson Davis, who in turn derived them from the eighteenth century philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg – or from conversations, as Davis claimed, with Swedenborg’s spirit” (Weinberg. p.93)

Nowadays we take for granted a pre-eminent role in early Spiritualism for the Fox Sisters. But that was not how it appeared to all contemporaries. And in Dr John Buescher’s “The Other Side of Death - Spiritualism and Nineteenth Century Experience” (2004) which has 280 pages, the Fox sisters are not mentioned until p.72, 50 pages after Davis.

The Capron and Barron pamphlet is artless and unsophisticated, touching briefly on matters much elaborated in later literature. Capron in particular later wrote one of the more systematic early histories “Modern Spiritualism – its Frauds and Fanaticisms” (1855) also reprinted by Kessinger.

The 1850 booklet however, has a claim to be the first general treatise on Spiritualism. Historians of the Movement can now go back beyond later synthesisers to original sources with unprecedented ease, and search certain texts on line.

³⁸ See: - <http://www.kessinger.net/searchresults-orderthebook.php?ISBN=1432667696>

³⁹ See: - http://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&id=niYPAAAAIAAJ&dq=capron+barron+explanation&prints=frontcover&source=web&ots=DSOQc-4tBG&sig=iVxs9LHB4kxtSsRL2-IhqUvqldk&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPP1,M1

For example, take the Autobiography of A.J. Davis “The Magic Staff”. The text can be found on line. We can then enter words like “Fox”, or “Hydesville “and discover what mention is made of them.

Even since this newsletter was founded in 2004, research of this kind has been greatly facilitated by Google Books digitisation.

L.P...

**GOOD NEWS
For
PSYCHICAL RESEARCH**

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**Finally! We're back online!**

[www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk](http://www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk)

After about 6 months of absence, we're thrilled to announce that we're back online!

You may have already spotted our new web address - we've added **.uk** at the end. There was no clever reason for this, it was a decision we were forced to make because of a misunderstanding with our previous web host. Little did we know that whilst we were in the process of renewing our web space, our domain name had expired and was being made available to the public. Unfortunately, someone snapped it up without us knowing and is now using our previous address. (We have no connection to that website). So, I'm afraid, we had to settle for the next best option which was [www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk](http://www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk)

Needless to say, you'll have to update any bookmarks you have and we apologise for that. An easy way is to simply type “.uk” after the “org” and the correct page will be displayed.

If you have any problems, or you simply want to drop us a line, reply to this email or contact us at contact [at] [survivalafterdeath.org.uk](http://www.survivalafterdeath.org.uk)

[**Note by PsyPioneer:** - Dr. Carlos S. Alvarado is affiliated with the Division of Perceptual Studies, Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, at the University of Virginia.<sup>40</sup>]

## **Charles Richet on “The Limits of Psychic and Metapsychic Science”**

**Carlos S. Alvarado**

In the past some authors have interpreted psychic phenomena in conventional psychological ways such as suggestion, hallucination, and a variety of processes involving the subconscious mind. The excerpt presented in this article is a version of this view published in one of the most influential European treatises of psychical research in the 1920s authored by French physiologist Charles Richet.

### **Conventional Explanations of Mediumship**

Some of this conceptual tradition of conventional explanations includes the ideas of individuals that have discussed mediumship and other phenomena, assuming that automatism and psychopathology could account for the observations reported. Examples from the late nineteenth-century are writings such as Carpenter’s *Mesmerism and Spiritualism, &c. Historically and Scientifically Considered* (1877), as well as the work of Hammond (1876) and Janet (1889).

There were several discussions of the concept of iatrogenic creation of mediumistic personalities, as seen in critiques of the reincarnation content of some communications (Aksakof, 1875). Both Théodore Flournoy (1900) and Joseph Maxwell (1903/1905) discussed the creation of mediumistic personalities as a function of suggestion. The ideas of Flournoy influenced Richet’s later writings. As Flournoy (1900) stated in his classic *From India to the Planet Mars*: “We must . . . take into consideration the enormous suggestibility and auto-suggestibility of mediums, which render them so sensitive to all the influences of spiritistic reunions, and are so favorable to the play of those brilliant subliminal creations in which, occasionally, the doctrinal ideas of the surrounding environment are reflected together with the latent emotional tendencies of the medium herself” (p. 443).

Others, such as Myers (1884), offered conventional explanations of mediumistic phenomena that involved subconscious creativity, but also included psychic phenomena such as telepathy between the living. In fact Myers (1903) argued that the majority of supernormal phenomena “are due to the action of the still embodied spirit of the agent or percipient himself” (Vol. 1, p. 6). Later researchers defending human agency through phenomena such as telepathy included Flournoy (1911). There was also a group of writers that argued that physical mediumship could be explained

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<sup>40</sup> See: - <http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/personalitystudies/Carlosbio.cfm>

through human agency, as seen in Rogers *Philosophy of Mysterious Agents* (1853) and Sudre's *Introduction à la métapsychique humaine* (1926).

### **Charles Richet**

Charles Richet (1850-1935), the author of the excerpt presented here, has been discussed frequently. His psychical research included experimental work with clairvoyance, and seances, among other topics. (1) In his Presidential Address to the Society for Psychical Research he renamed the field using the term metapsychics (Richet, 1905), and he popularized the term in his later writings, particularly in the influential *Traité de métapsychique* (Richet, 1922), whose second edition was translated into English as *Thirty Years of Psychical Research* (Richet, 1923).

Due to Richet's scientific prestige—having conducted much medical and physiological research and having been granted a Nobel prize in 1913 for his work in anaphylaxis (Wolf, 1993)—this book was very influential, particularly in Europe. (2)

At the beginning of the book Richet discussed conventional explanations of some psychic phenomena. These included the creative and memory capabilities of the subconscious mind. Furthermore, Richet followed previous writers and discussed the idea that the capabilities of the subconscious mind could include the acquisition of supernormal information.

Richet's emphasis on the capabilities of the subconscious is not surprising considering his previous writings on the "objectification of types," or the creation of personalities under hypnosis (Richet, 1883). Referring to mediumship, Richet (1884) stated that "all the intelligent manifestations attributed to the spirits are due to an individual that is unconscious and active at the same time" (p. 650). Some years later, in his Presidential Address to the Society for Psychical Research, Richet (1905) referred to the phenomena of hypnotic personifications where it was evident that no spirit influence was present. He wondered if the personifications that "play a large role in spiritism were but phenomena of the same genre" (p. 45).

In what follows I present excerpts of the English translation of this section, as an example of discussions of the topic for the period in which the book appeared.

### **The Limits of Psychic and Metapsychic Science**

A primary difficulty confronts us, for as soon as we can explain any phenomena of lucidity by extreme acuteness of intelligence or by systematic treatment of the subconscious, it is clear that there is no need to refer it to metapsychics, i.e., to assume unknown faculties or the intervention of external intelligences. It will suffice to say that it is only the effect of exceptional human acuteness. We are therefore bound first to investigate the limits to human intelligence.

This is exceedingly difficult, for many intellectual phenomena occur quite apart from consciousness; and these have belonged to normal psychology since the time of Leibnitz. The mind can

work without the assistance of consciousness; very complex intellectual processes take place unknown to us, and a whole world of ideas vibrates in us of which we are unconscious. Probably no remembrance of the past is completely effaced; consciously we forget much, but memory forgets nothing; the mass of past impressions is retained almost intact, though consciousness of them has vanished. For the subconsciousness wakes and works side by side with sleeping consciousness, and there can be no doubt that comparisons, associations, and judgments are formed in which the conscious self takes no part. The importance of these phenomena of the subconscious cannot be over-emphasized; but as everything that can be explained by normal psychology should be eliminated from metapsychics, and as the subconscious work of the mind pertains to normal psychology, we must lay down and always remember the law—subconsciousness is competent to do everything that consciousness can do.

Our senses give us our notions of things, and we know those things by what our senses bring us . . . but rearrangements of sensorial data may make our notions extremely complex. Thus the subconsciousness can construct poetry, discourses, drama, and mathematics everything that consciousness can construct. Nevertheless all this wealth is reconstructive; intelligence, whether conscious or subconscious, can never furnish more than it has been given unless we suppose some new faculty of cognition to exist. Intelligence can only work on material supplied by normal sensorial channels.

To quote a well-known simile, a mill is excellent for grinding, but can never produce anything but what it has been given to grind.

Let us suppose that Helen Smith (3) has never heard a word of Sanscrit nor read or seen any Sanscrit book. Then if she should speak or write in Sanscrit—i.e., re-invent that language—I should consider the event miraculous, and a metapsychic phenomenon; for no human intelligence could do this.

Before drawing so extreme an inference, however, my reluctance to admit the supernormal will oblige me to make all possible suppositions. It must first be established that she has never opened a Sanscrit book, and such proof is not easy to get; for even if her good faith is assured she may have forgotten that one day in some public or private library she turned over the leaves of such a book. Besides, the Sanscrit phrase must not be a mere quotation, but have reference to present circumstances. The conditions necessary to scientific conviction of the transcendental nature of the phenomenon are so onerous that I doubt if they can often be found concurrent.

Similarly A., an unpoetical person who has never written any verse, composes poems showing delicate and original poetic faculty while in a mediumistic state. She thus writes several volumes of verse, dictating so rapidly as to make it difficult to follow. This is certainly very surprising; but before supposing that some external intelligence intervenes I shall make the simpler hypothesis that she has subconscious poetic faculty. Her verses, however good, do not transcend human intelligence.

I know that spiritualists and occultists will exclaim against this as they did against my learned friend, T. Flournoy. But their objections are not justified, for it lies on them to prove the intervention of extraneous intelligence; and this proof can be given only by establishing the absolute incapacity of subconscious intelligence to write the verse or to remember certain scraps of Sanscrit.

Laplace says somewhere, The rigour of proof must be proportionate to the gravity of the conclusion. Now to admit that an extra-terrene intelligence moves the brain of Helen Smith to inspire her with Sanscrit, or the brain of A. to dictate French verse, is an inference so contrary to common-sense and logic that I shall admit any hypothesis short of mathematical or physical impossibility, rather than that of an extra-terrene mind. It is reasonable to suppose that Helen Smith has retained in an impeccable memory some phrases of Sanscrit read ten years before, and that A. may subconsciously construct verses as rapidly as a professional poet.

Every normal hypothesis must be exhausted, and also the subconscious work of the mind and the resources of an infallible memory, before we can dare to affirm the intervention of another intelligence . . . .

On my asking Stella (4) for the name of one of the women who tended my infancy, she replied, "Melanie." I was not thinking of Melanie, and I am most positively sure that this name, which disappeared out of my life fifty years ago, and which I have not thought of for those fifty years, has never been uttered by me. In this case I am obliged to infer a metapsychic phenomenon, for neither pantomnesia nor subconscious mentation working up old remembrances can account for this name emerging. I put chance on one side.

It will then be no matter for astonishment if we refuse to admit, as metapsychic, various phenomena that present a metapsychic aspect to credulous persons. By the joint action of pantomnesia (5) and the subconscious working of the mind some persons can produce poetical, fanciful, or scientific work of a

complex and very wonderful nature, but which ought not to surprise us more than if they were consciously produced.

Stella in her normal state never composes poetry, but in her mediumistic state dictates, through the table, verses, sometimes of high merit, on a subject given to her and in a prescribed number of words. But I may say, without vanity, that I myself, simultaneously, by a kind of collaboration with Petrarch, who (according to the table) was speaking through Stella, was able to compose four lines on a given subject in a required number of words; and this poetry to order was neither better nor worse than that of "Petrarch." I prefer to suppose that Stella composed unconsciously what I was able to compose consciously; at any rate, that is much simpler than to suppose the intervention of Petrarch . . . .

In a mediumistic state Victorien Sardou drew a curious and well-known design entitled *The House of Mozart*. (6) Nothing could be more strange, but I shall always feel it simpler to admit that the genius of Sardou did the subconscious work than to imagine that the soul of Mozart moved Sardou's muscles.

Every case must be carefully scrutinized before it is admitted as genuinely metapsychic; but the delicate and difficult process of analyzing such cases will lead us . . . to the conclusion that there is a small number of subjective intellectual facts (much less numerous than spiritualists suppose), which neither pantomnesia nor the subconscious elaboration of remembrances can account for.

Nevertheless, even the facts inexplicable by pantomnesia do not necessarily imply the presence of an external intelligence; for yet another hypothesis is possible—that human intelligence has a greater range than that we are accustomed to attribute to it . . . .

There may be other senses than the five known to us. Some animals, pigeons for instance, have a sense of direction that escapes our analysis. Why should there be no cognitive faculties other than our senses? We think that the magnet, though it acts upon iron, does not act on our nervous centres; but if it were discovered that it does, I for one should not be greatly surprised. Wireless telegraphy has shown us that messages can be transmitted through space; it is therefore possible that by an analogous but invisible mechanism to which our instruments and our senses are insensitive, the brain may be affected without our being able to perceive anything either of the transmitter or the receiver. It is our ignorance that confines all possible knowledge of the external world to our five senses.

Accordingly, before inferring the existence of extraneous intelligence, I willingly admit, as a provisional hypothesis, that there are in us cognitive faculties as yet undetermined, neither usual nor of daily occurrence, but irregular in their appearance and mysterious in their action. (7)

That is metapsychics, and we have to decide between two hypotheses.

1. Does an external intelligence act on ours?
2. Is our intelligence endowed with a new faculty of cognition?

Subjective phenomena alone are not sufficient for a decision between these two hypotheses; it will be necessary to examine . . . whether the aggregate evidence pointing to extra-terrene intelligence is sufficient to prove either the hypothesis that human intelligence is endowed with faculties new to us; or, that extraneous *intelligences incorporate and incarnate themselves in humanity* . . . .

We learn from psychology that pantomnesia exists, and also that the subconscious, perhaps even more than the conscious, is capable of prolonged and skilful elaboration of its materials.

In fine, in order to distinguish between the psychological and the metapsychic we shall adopt the criterion: Everything that the human intelligence can do, even when it is most profound and penetrating, is psychological. Everything of which such intelligence is incapable belongs to metapsychics.

If Helen Smith, without having read or heard a single word of Sanscrit, speaks it fluently and correctly, that would be metapsychic, for no human intelligence can reconstruct a language. A., thinking herself inspired by her "guide," composes verses quickly and well; this is psychological, for many persons, and perhaps A., among them, can do the same.

Stella tells me the name of an old servant of my parents fifty years ago. This is metapsychic, for she has certainly never heard me pronounce that name; and no intelligence, conscious or unconscious, could give that name without having heard it.

T. leaves his friend J. in good health. He see his friend's apparition, notes the hour, and says, "J. died at nine o'clock in the evening." This is metapsychic, for no normal psychological process could have revealed it.

Thus the work of analysis, demanding most scrupulous care, will be to examine whether the facts under consideration are

explicable by known mental laws, or whether it is not necessary . . . to suppose the existence of a special sensitiveness which I call cryptesthesia—a new faculty of cognition, called lucidity by ancient authors and telepathy by modern ones (Richet, 1923, pp. 49-55).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Richet's thoughts are representative of different aspects of the conceptual history of psychical research. For example, they show the constant struggle between survival and non-survival explanations of psychic phenomena when human faculties are postulated to account for manifestations such as mediumistic communications. Earlier discussions such as those of Flournoy (1900) and Myers (1884, 1903), among others, inspired Richet's arguments.

At the same time, the excerpt from Richet illustrates that area of phenomena that Hyslop (1906) referred to as the "borderland of psychical research." These were phenomena that allowed us to distinguish the normal and the abnormal from the supernormal, and as such had an important and practical use for the psychical researcher. Such area included phenomena such as hallucinations, illusions and psychophysiological manifestations, and the capabilities of the subconscious mentioned by Richet in the excerpt: creativity, detailed memory, and changes of personality. The latter has been very important in the histories of both hypnosis and secondary personalities, areas to which Richet was a contributor during the nineteenth century (e.g., Richet, 1883). (8)

While some of the above mentioned figures—particularly Myers and Flournoy—made more valuable and detailed contributions to the topic in question than Richet did, the latter contributed much to publicize the idea that: "The talents of the unconscious show even more variety than those of consciousness" (Richet, 1923, p. 44).

### **Notes**

1. Some recent discussions of Richet's psychical research include Alvarado (in press), Brower (2005, Chapter 3), Le Maléfan (2002), and Monroe (2008, pp. 208, 211, 212). Wolf (1993) has discussed Richet's career in medicine and physiology.
2. The *Traité* was extensively reviewed. Examples include long essays published in Italy (Bozzano, 1922), France (Janet, 1923), and England (Lodge, 1924).
3. Hélène Smith (pseudonym of Catherine Elise Müller) was a medium investigated by psychologist Théodore Flournoy, as reported by him in a classic book bringing together mediumship and psychological analysis (Flournoy, 1900). Flournoy gave psychological explanations for the medium's mediumistic romances of a previous life in France, in India, as well as of life on Mars. Both Smith and Flournoy are discussed by Shamdasani (1994).

4. Richet (1923) described Stella as “young lady who is not a professional medium and only took up spiritualism by chance” (p. 147, her phenomena are discussed on pages 147-149).

5. Richet (1923) defined the term in a footnote: “I propose pantomnesia to indicate that no vestige of our intellectual past is entirely effaced. Probably we are all pantomnesic. In weighing metapsychic facts it should be taken for granted that we do not absolutely forget anything that has once impressed our senses” (p. 52).

6. Victorien Sardou (1831-1908) was a well-known French playwright. He wrote about his mediumistic communications and drawings of houses in Jupiter where both Mozart and Zoroaster lived (Sardou, 1858/n.d.). His interests in spiritism has been discussed by Hart (1913, Chapter 12). According to Flammarion (1907), “my illustrious friend Victorien Sardou . . . had written, as a medium, some curious pages on the inhabitants of the planet Jupiter, and had produced picturesque and surprising designs, having as their aim to represent men and things as they appeared in this giant of worlds . . . One of his sketches showed us the house of Mozart, others the houses of Zoroaster and of Bernard Palissy [a French 16th century ceramist and glassworker], who were country neighbors in one of the landscapes of this immense planet . . .” (p. 25). Following on the tradition of conventional explanations, Flammarion argued that these productions did not come from spirits, but were the result of the medium’s resources: “A person is not magnetized, nor hypnotized, nor put to sleep in any way while in that state. But the brain is not ignorant of what is taking place: its cells perform their functions, and act (doubtless by a reflex movement) upon the motor nerves. At that time we all thought Jupiter was inhabited by a superior race of beings. The spiritistic communications were the reflex of the general ideas in the air” (p. 26)

7. Richet (1884, 1888, 1889) had discussed the topic in previous papers in which he reported several experiments.

8. On this topic, as well as on Richet’s work, see Carroy (1993). Myers (1903) saw the phenomena in question as more than mere conventional explanations. In his view these phenomena presented gradations of actions of a subliminal self closely related to phenomena such as telepathy and mediumship and to the issue of survival of bodily death.

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## CFPSS REPENTANCE

The Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies has repented of its plan to close down its flagship journal "The Christian Parapsychologist." and replace it with a new journal. (See *Psypioneer* February 2008<sup>41</sup>.)

The news is discreetly conveyed to readers on the outside back cover of the September 2008 issue of CP, the last to be edited by Canon Michael Perry, who is retiring after thirty years as editor.

With effect from 2009, the *Christian Parapsychologist* will be published twice-yearly, and edited by Mr Robert Gilbert.

Bob Gilbert is well-qualified to edit CP. He has many years service with CFPSS, some as regional organiser. He is an antiquarian bookseller of international reputation,

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<sup>41</sup> See page 44: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.2February08..pdf>

and a leading author on the history of freemasonry, on the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, mysticism and religious fundamentalism, the last of which he is against.

[He is also a reader of this newsletter. All editors in this field should be, one might suggest!]

Sometimes publications can be damaged when they move from quarterly to less frequently. LIGHT for example nominally appears twice a year, but there was one issue in 2007, and only one in 2008. But we wish CP all the best in its new format.

LP.

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[**Note by Psypioneer:** - Although Maurice Elliott, first hon. Secretary of CFPS enjoyed a variety of psychic experiences, perhaps none left a greater impression than the saving of his daughter. This was described in the book he and his wife wrote "A Modern Miracle" (1922? Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincolnshire, published by Gordon Hallam Elliott), which went through at least five editions.

This early article from Occult Review, December 1921, p324-332, recalls that miracle, but is prefaced by some minor psychic experiences.]

## **AN ACCOUNT OF SOME OF OUR PSYCHIC EXPERIENCES**

**BY THE REV. G. MAURICE ELLIOTT AND  
IRENE HALLAM ELLIOTT,**

Authors of "*Angels Seen To-day*," "*In Converse with Angels*," "*The Challenge of Spiritualism*," "*Why Not Face the Facts?*"

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WE have been asked to write an article for the OCCULT REVIEW dealing with our psychic experiences generally, and making special reference to that experience which has lately been so prominent in the Press.

We have already refused all such invitations sent us by that portion of the Press which knows little of psychic science and less of spiritual science. But when the invitation comes from the OCCULT REVIEW we are only too glad to accept it.

At the outset, however, a difficulty confronts us. What kind of experiences are we to relate? We, like many others, have had such a variety of psychical experiences that it

is really most difficult to decide which are likely to be most useful for the OCCULT REVIEW. We have therefore decided not to pick and choose, but just to write them down as they come into our minds, and to simplify matters we shall use "we" to mean either or both.

Not long ago we were seriously "called over the coals" by a certain Bishop who confused Spiritualism with psychic science and who asked a number of very knotty questions which called for careful and sufficient replies on the spur of the moment. This difficulty was overcome by the fact that our Guide was present with us, and told us what answers to give to each question asked by the Bishop. The result was that, while we thanked the Bishop for the help he had given us, his lordship urged that the enlightenment given to him in our replies far exceeded any assistance he might have given us. Those who tell us that no practical assistance is ever given by those "ministering spirits" whom the Church hymn calls "heavenly guides" are very ignorant of the facts, for had our replies been unsatisfactory we might have lost our position in the Church.

When studying for a rather stiff examination we were told by one of our Guides to cease studying at 11 p.m. and retire to rest. This rule was very irksome, and we sometimes entirely forgot that there was such a thing as Time and Rest. Often when in the middle of mastering some difficult point the light in the study would begin to be lowered, and was even turned right out by unseen hands, and we would make the discovery that the hour of eleven had struck. That was really a very annoying, though an extremely kind, action on the part of the Guides, was it not? Being of a scientific turn of mind, we made a very thorough examination of all the gas-jets in the house (and this we did on each occasion), wondering whether there could possibly be any ordinary reason for the light going out in the study and not in any of the other rooms in the house. We found no ordinary reason. But we found this extraordinary phenomenon, namely that we could not re-light the gas in the study the same night. The cynic may curl his lip and the philosopher shake his head, but neither of them could have lighted the study again that same night. The phenomenon occurred five or six times.

Many, many times when preparing addresses or lectures this sort of thing has happened: A Guide will suddenly come into vision and tell us that on such and such a page of a certain book - sometimes a book of poems, sometimes the Bible or a psychic journal, as the case may be - we shall find a fitting illustration, quotation, or poem for that particular part of the address or lecture. Now, surely, that is a practical form of guidance.

A writer on psychic subjects had arranged to take tea with us, Her husband was to accompany her. She arrived without him and explained that he had rather a nasty cold and had thought it wise to remain indoors. When she returned home in the evening she found him very much better, and they both enjoyed a good evening meal. About 10.30 p.m. we were sitting in our study reading, when to our amazement we looked up from our books and saw that the walls had become draped with purple and black material. This gave us quite a shock for the moment. But we were quickly made to realize that someone had "passed away." We waited and wondered. Then came a knock at the front door and a messenger handed us a letter from the friend who had taken tea with us, stating that her

husband collapsed immediately after dinner and had “passed away.” She urged that we should go to her at once, which, of course, we did.

One day while we were receiving messages from a Guide, who was speaking to us as plainly and distinctly as ever a human being spoke to another, our little baby was heard crying upstairs in the night-nursery. This disturbed us a little. But a dead relative who had lately passed over came into the room and told us not to be agitated, as she would go to baby and soothe her off to sleep again. This she did.

When visiting the inmates of one of our largest work homes we found a man tormented by spirits whose chief delight seemed to be in tempting him to drink. He had been a drunkard. At night these spirits came and stood at the foot of his bed and held out to him glasses of drink - the smell of which nearly drove him mad with desire. Neither the Master, Matron, Sister nor Nurse would listen to his pitiful story. Poor man! - they all thought was mad... But he was not mad. We told him the kind of beings these spirits were, and why they delighted in tormenting him, and we urged him to pray for their advancement. They came again, but never to tempt or torment; they came to express their gratitude for his prayers. The poor man had not long to live on earth, and we told him much that we knew of the Hereafter, and did our best to help him prepare for the new life. His last days on earth were days of joy and gladness, and his “passing” was most peaceful. It was not long before this man came back to us, and in the presence of others, besides ourselves, expressed his deep gratitude for the understanding sympathy and practical help we had been able to give him, and which had made his “passing” so joyful and peaceful.

A dear friend of ours was a doubter; she would not believe in the reality of psychic phenomena unless she herself had evidence. Her brother had lately passed away. He came to us the day before the arrival of our friend who was coming to stay with us. In earth-life he had always worn a long beard. In spirit-life he appeared to be clean-shaven, and we hardly liked to tell his sister that her brother had been to see us, lest she might ask us to describe his appearance. However, our misgivings were speedily removed by the brother urging us to make a special point of saying that he had returned in a clean-shaven condition. We wondered why. The friend came and we told her that her brother had been to see us. She asked what he was like to look at. We described his general features, which made her open her eyes, but when we told her he was, curiously enough, clean-shaven, she cried, “Oh, how wonderful!” We asked why. She replied, “Because, although he had always a beard, yet, when I went to see him in the nursing home the day before he died, I found to my amazement that they had shaved him and I remember thinking that he looked like a plucked fowl. “A plucked fowl” may sound a little vulgar, yet certain sights do remind one of very odd things, do they not? From that day to this our friend has been much more than interested in the psychic side of things. Subsequently her brother told us that he came clean-shaven because he felt sure that it would convince his sister - especially as we had not the remotest notion that he was not wearing his beard when he passed away.

On one occasion we were staying with some friends who lived some seven miles from the coast, and we had cycled to the sea for a bathe. After the bathe we felt very hungry, as most people do, and discovered to our dismay that we had left home without a farthing in our pockets. We had arranged to spend the afternoon by the seashore but could not very well do so unless we could get some refreshment. We wondered how the Guides could help us in such a predicament, and why they had allowed us to come out without any money. Was it their purpose to teach us once again the lesson that when clothes are changed the contents of the pockets must be transferred to the new apparel? Or had they some surprise in store for us which later on we should report to the OCCULT REVIEW? Well, we were guided to the seashore and led to sit down close to the water's edge. We waited and watched until the incoming tide threw up a purse containing just enough silver to enable us to have a good meal and a cup of tea. It was, of course, a perfectly amazing happening. But it did happen and it is a fact, and as we have been risked to give some psychic experiences we have given this one because our Guides told us afterwards that they had arranged it all. We have not dwelt upon the fact that we prayed very earnestly that, if it was God's will, something supernormal might happen, because all believers in psychic science have learnt to pray without ceasing. It should also be remembered that the occasion was a little unique in that our holiday was a very short one and it was very necessary that we should spend as much time as possible by the sea. However, nothing we could say, no argument that might be advanced, would have the slightest effect upon the cynic. He smiles. So do we.

So we might go on relating experience after experience - some very vital, some seemingly trivial to the trivial mind of Mr. Know-all who knows nothing whatever about the subject, some extraordinarily practical, and so forth. Our reason for omitting any reference to what one might call "distinctively religious experiences" is that such experiences have already been related in our published writings. We ourselves do not care to make any distinction between the various experiences. What seems "trivial" to an outsider may be very vital to the person concerned. It is often a seemingly trivial incident that will "knock silly" a strictly scientific investigator. We have heard a man state publicly that he longed to be at rest in the arms of Jesus. And we have heard that same man say that he would not be happy in heaven unless he had his old pipe and mare with him. Which is the more trivial: the orthodox view of heaven which leads a man to picture himself in the arms of Jesus smoking a pipe, or Raymond's "cigar and whisky"? We ask the question most reverently and most seriously, for it is very clear to us that Raymond's "cigar and whisky" is in no sense "trivial," but is a fact which will yet cause the Christian Church to reconsider her whole attitude towards the after-life.

We now give a brief account of that experience which has lately been so prominent in the Press - not only of this country but in America, France, Holland, Belgium, etc. - and we are anxious that the readers of the OCCULT REVIEW should know that we in no way sought this publicity. It came about thus: On October 2, Mr. Elliott was asked to preach at Norwich on the subject of "Converse with Angels," and Mrs. Elliott was asked to address a women's Bible class on the same subject. On the Saturday evening a press reporter interviewed Mr. Elliott, who told him of the experience we are about to relate, making him promise not to report it. On the Monday afternoon Mrs. Elliott went to the

women's Bible class prepared to tell them of her own wonderful experience of angel-guidance. When she arrived at the church in which the Bible class was to be held she found to her dismay that the Bible class had swelled into a packed church of men and women. Being unused to public speaking, and having no other address prepared, she told the story just as she would have told it to the women's Bible class.

Next morning the papers were ablaze with the reports, which both grieved and horrified us, for the Press had made "copy" of a very sacred experience and had exposed us to an overwhelming amount of misjudgment. We say no more, feeling sure that those who have been "put in the Press" will know how crushing and unpleasant it is. We are therefore glad of the opportunity of giving an accurate account of what took place.

In our home we have tried very hard to worship God with our minds as well as with our hearts and to be able to give a *reason* for the faith that is in us. Now, such a statement as "He shall give His angels charge over thee" appeared to us to be entirely reasonable, seeing that the angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to do service on behalf of them that shall inherit salvation," that they came to men and women all through the Old Testament, that they came to our Lord, and that they came to His followers both before and after Pentecost. We saw no reason why angels should not come to earth to-day nor why all of us should not have guardian angels; indeed we saw every reason for believing in this ministry of angels.

After ten long years with no jewel in our nursery casket, we became happy and expectant parents; our hearts were light and the mother's hands were soon busy making preparations to give welcome to a little pink treasure whom our doctor said we might expect with the roses in June. After a while things did not turn out well, and as the dreary days of November shortened, the expectant mother became very frail and was growing weaker every day. Her condition caused the doctor no little anxiety, and at last he called in a Harley Street specialist of much repute to meet him in consultation. After spending a long time in examination, and a longer time in consultation, he declared that the doctor's diagnosis was incorrect and most misleading, but said that he must see the mother in a few weeks' time before giving his final opinion. The symptoms still continued in a very violent form and the patient was reduced to something like a skeleton and craved for the day when the specialist would come again. Nevertheless, she remained bright with hope sustained by a lively faith. The looked-for day arrived. A second examination was made and another and final pronouncement given.

The specialist's final conclusion was that the doctor was entirely wrong, our hopes were vain, and that June held no special treasure in store for us. He sternly stated that all the symptoms were caused by maternal hope producing what is known in the medical as pseudocycosis, and he added further to the already heavy burden the need for an immediate operation of a very serious nature. The expectant mother was told to banish from her mind all her hopes, and to disrobe the nursery. We leave it to the readers, and especially to mothers, to imagine what this meant to one who had been battling hard against mental and physical suffering.

It was at this point that the vital question had to be asked and answered. And the question was this: Could anything more be done? Supposing the specialist were wrong, what then? How could we be sure he was right when the mother's intuition was wholly opposed to the specialist's opinion.

She knew that she had never for one moment *imagined* anything in connexion with a love-blossom in June. What could we do? Dared we reject such expert advice at such a critical moment? Was intuition to be trusted? We dared not run the risk. So we thought it over carefully and prayerfully, and finding that we both doubted the wisdom of the specialist's advice, we asked ourselves the question: Is there a higher Court of Appeal? Was it possible to get to know our Heavenly Father's will in such a way as to leave us in no shadow of doubt?

We again pondered over the words "He shall give His Angels charge over thee," and we determined to put the truth of those words to the test. We argued thus: If we have by our side guardian angels, they must surely know whether the specialist or the mother is right? And if they know, then surely they must wish us to know, and must be trying to tell us. But *how* could they tell us even if they wished to do so? Could they make themselves seen and heard as in days of old? We knew that nothing short of a miracle could ease the tension and lift us out of the abyss of mental torture.

With spiritual faculties alert and with lively faith we both prayed very humbly to our Father-Mother God, believing that "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think," and we definitely asked for direct divine guidance.

We had not long to wait, for without delay our loving Heavenly Father-Mother gave answer to our prayer.

An angel of the Lord appeared to us in dazzling brightness, His face and form were clearly visible and he was seen and heard by us *objectively*. He brought glad tidings of great joy which eased the nerve-strain which had all but reached breaking-point. You see, we had arrived at the critical moment when it was absolutely necessary to make a decision in favour of the operation or take the full responsibility of rejecting the specialist's advice. The angel soon reversed all the advice given by the specialist and gave us the fullest assurance that an operation would imperil the life of the mother and most surely that of the child. The angel then went on to assure us that all was well with the little sleeper, who would, without doubt, awaken in June.

The specialist had made a grave error. The doctor, on the other hand, had retained his opinion, but medical etiquette naturally forbade his saying so.

When the doctor called to make arrangements for the operation he was not a little surprised to find us so happy, and when we informed him that we had decided against the operation he was nonplussed and anxiously asked the name of the one who had been so bold as to give contrary advice. We told him that he would not know the name were it given, but that later on we would tell him all about what had happened. Whereupon he exclaimed: "Well, I am thankful to hear your decision," and when

asked *why*, he replied, “Because I would never have advocated the operation, for I would not have held myself responsible for two funerals.”

That is the first part of this story of divine guidance.

The father, being a clergyman and always anxious to put all spiritual experience to the test, expressed the wish that we might be led to some one who might be able to prove the truth of the angel’s message. Not that he doubted the truth for one moment. But he wanted to convince others, namely, three bishops to whom he had told the story of the angel’s visit. The angel came again in order to enable the father to satisfy his wish. To this end we were told to take a journey to a certain place some forty miles away, and to cancel a journey we had arranged to take to Devonshire. This at once made us realize the truth of the words, “Our ways are not God’s ways; man plans out his path, but God directs his steps.”

We were wonderfully guided on the journey and the angel led us to a resting-place close to the sea, and told us that we should find seated next us at dinner a London surgeon who would wend his way alone to the drawing-room after the meal, thus affording an opportunity for conversation. And thus it was. The surgeon was staying at the hotel, he *did* sit next us at dinner, and he was the only person to go to the drawing-room after dinner. The father hastily followed and immediately opened up conversation, and the surgeon made it quite easy for him to speak about his anxiety concerning the specialist's opinion. The moment the surgeon heard the story his sympathy was elicited and in a practical way, for he put at our disposal his skill and time, and, before we rested that night, he to whom the angel had led us gladly and joyfully confirmed all that the angel had said. The surgeon unhesitatingly affirmed that an operation would have been disastrous to the mother and fatal to the little sleeper.

We were then led to tell the surgeon the angel's part in guiding us to him, which interested him beyond measure, though it did not unduly surprise him, for he answered, “I too have received a direct answer to prayer, for, before I left home, I had knelt down and asked God to lead me to some one whom I could really help” We offered the surgeon a fee for the examination, but could not persuade him to accept it.

We were subsequently led in a truly wonderful way to a gynaecologist in Harley Street who corroborated the surgeon’s opinion.

How natural it all was, and how beautiful; it was human, and it was divine; it was religious, and it was scientific.

The Harley Street specialist who had made the grave error held to his opinion until the tangible proof of pink splendour blossomed forth and convinced him to the contrary.

Our heaven-preserved little one was indeed “God's gift” and has been christened “Dorothea,” which means “God's gift.”

The facts of the case were fully known to three bishops before the little one was born, and as a special act of thanksgiving a bishop baptized our child in the cathedral.

Last month the surgeon, whom we have not seen for over two years, was interviewed by a press reporter and corroborated all that we had said about him. The interview was reported in the Press.

Upon hearing the story, one of our greatest scientists wrote: "Permit me to congratulate you and your wife on the real and distinct help which was vouchsafed you personally. It is one of the many answers which can be given to those ignorant people who say that communications have never yet proved of any service. Such people are utterly ignorant and mistaken."

It now only remains to be said that had we been deaf to the Word of God and blind to the presence of God's messenger, an operation would have taken place, one life if not two would have been destroyed, and the truth would never have been known.

Surely the day is fast dawning when so-called miracles will be the natural result of a true and lively faith in our Father-Mother God Who has "ordained and constituted the service of angels and men in a wonderful order" to succour and defend us on earth.

DR. WILLIAM BRITTEN

1821c – 1894

It is rare to find any works written by this gentleman; *Dr. Britten was a graduate of the Vitapathic College of the United States, an Englishman by birth, and a worldwide traveler. He spoke many foreign languages fluently, and was in all respects a phenomenally gifted man*⁴².

October 11th 1870 in New Jersey, he married Emma Hardinge Britten and played an active part in her work until his death on November 24th 1894. He published some of his wife's works e.g., "*Nineteenth Century Miracles*" Manchester 1883 and New York in 1884. Dr. Britten was President of "*The Two Worlds*"⁴³ founded by Emma Hardinge Britten in 1887.

Below is taken from "The Two Worlds" September 28th 1888: -

⁴² Taken from his obituary *LIGHT* December 1, 1894

⁴³ "*The Two Worlds Publishing Company Limited*" the first meeting of the shareholders was on February 7th 1888.

FISHER'S GHOST; OR, THE GATE IN THE LANE

*(Narrative of an Incident occurring near Sydney, Australia, and verified by
OFFICIAL RECORDS and many respectable witnesses)*

By Wm. BRITTEN

IN the second volume of "Glimpses of the Supernatural" [1875] by the Rev. F. G. Lee, D.C.L., at page 61 is a very imperfect account of an incident well known in Australia, and communicated in full to the writer of this paper by the late Hon. Jno. Bowie Wilson,⁴⁴ formerly Land Minister of New South Wales. This gentleman was a resident of that province during the occurrences to be narrated, and one whose noble character and high official position afforded ample warranty for the full authenticity of his statements. We may add that since the narrative was furnished to us by Dr. Wilson, it has been confirmed by several legal gentlemen who referred the writer to the official testimony taken at the time of the occurrence, and found in the criminal records of the Government of New South Wales.

During the period that "Port Jackson" now called "Sydney"- was a penal settlement, a farmer by the name of Fisher made application to the Government to hire him out a servant from amongst the convicts who were sufficiently well behaved to be thus liberated. The convicts thus privileged were called "Government men," and at that period were about the only help farmers could obtain. The name of the man supplied to Mr. Fisher the writer only remembers as "James" (for so Fisher used to call him). The Government deprived convicts of their family name, calling them only by a number, instead of a name, when sent to what was called "Botany Bay." It may here be stated for the better information of Englishmen generally, that there never was a penal settlement at Botany Bay; the inlet of that name discovered by Captain Cook, and called by him "Botany Bay," on account of the abundance of beautiful flowers growing there, was abandoned by Cook on further discovering the more suitable locality which he named Port Jackson, subsequently called Sydney.

During the time that Sydney was a penal settlement, many persons being sent there for the mere offence of snaring a hare or killing a pheasant, have committed murder by mutual arrangement on each other that they might be hanged, and thus both put an end to their convict life; but to return to my story. Fisher had James, a Government man, assigned to him as a servant, and for a considerable time all went on well, and James - being intelligent, and desirous to please his new master - gained Fisher's confidence and esteem, and was trusted more and more as he became useful on the farm. So thoroughly did James gain upon his master's favour indeed, that he was frequently sent to market with cattle and produce, and became known and envied as "Fisher's factotum." After a time it was noticed that James attended market constantly, and Fisher was never seen. On the man being questioned as to his master's absence, he stated that he was preparing to take a trip to England to see his relatives, and shortly after this statement he reported that Mr. Fisher had sailed in a ship which had just left

⁴⁴ In Sydney Dr. J. Bowie Wilson was the first public man who openly avowed his belief. Public attention was first drawn to the subject in Victoria by some correspondence in the papers eight or ten years later, and, particularly, by a series of articles on "Spiritualism in America,"..... See page 225: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/18.PSYPIONEERFoundedbyLesliePrice.pdf>

the port of Sydney bound for London. This information James gave amongst others to a Mr. Johnson, a farmer, and the nearest of Fisher's neighbours. Fisher and Johnson being great friends, and Johnson hearing that Fisher had left the colony without seeing him, he was much annoyed, and the matter appeared to trouble him considerably.

He frequently told his wife that he could not have thought that Fisher would have behaved in such an unfriendly way. Johnson on his way to market was in the habit of taking a lonely road which led past Fisher's land, and on his return home one evening his wife noticed in his manner something which appeared to trouble him very much. He was silent and restless, and despite his long day's fatigue, he neither seemed able to keep still or eat his supper. On being remonstrated with by his wife, he replied in an agitated tone that he *was either going mad, or that he had seen a ghost*. He then related how on turning down the lane which skirted Fisher's fields, he distinctly saw his friend sitting on the gate which he had to pass. At first he felt little or no surprise at this sight, for he could never get over, the impression that Fisher had *not* left Australia, but had some reasons of his own for keeping out of his way. Glad of the opportunity to speak to his friend, he hastened up to the gate, keeping his eyes on Fisher all the time. "When I reached the spot," said he to his wife, "imagine my amazement to see the figure, which a moment before wore the exact appearance of the solid form and identity of Fisher, gradually *fade out*, and leave nothing but empty space behind! I looked all over the field and behind the gate," he added, "to see if I could discover any trace of the form. Not a living thing was to be seen, and I had to renew my journey with the terrible feeling that I was either out of my senses, or had seen the ghost of my friend Fisher." As this narrative had no other effect upon Mrs. Johnson than to induce her to re-echo her husband's suggestion of being "out of his senses," an opinion she coupled with a strong recommendation that he should go to bed and recover them in sleep, nothing more was said about the matter until the next market day, when Johnson went off as usual. Returning home by the same lane skirting Fisher's fields, he then and there saw the same figure, distinct and plain, looming up in a solid human shape, obscuring the landscape, and showing its proportions against the evening sky so clearly and well defined, that there could be no mistake about the reality of the form. For some time the horrified witness kept his gaze steadily fixed on the form of his friend. He took in all its details, even to the items of the well-remembered dress in which he had always been accustomed to see his neighbour, but when the figure slowly turned its head as if to look upon and address the witness, the reality was too much for him. A "dazed horror" came over him; for some time his senses and presence of mind forsook him, and when at last by a strong effort he regained self-control, the apparition had vanished, and the gate, lane, and fields were - as before - destitute of any living creature but himself.

It was on the following day that Johnson sought an interview with a friend of his, a gentleman holding an official position under Government, and a man of sound sense and education. To this person Johnson firmly, but with much solemnity, related the circumstances above detailed, concluding with the expression of his conviction that there was something wrong in the matter, and that he was determined to go over to Fisher's farm, and consult James about it. To this last proposition his friend thoroughly objected. "You know," he said, "that I am superintendent over the native settlement, and in my intercourse with

these aborigines, I have discovered that some among them possess very curious gifts - in fact, they are not unfrequently employed by the Government to trace out and recapture runaway convicts. They are endowed with some sense analogous to that of the *sleuthhound*, and from this remarkable faculty have obtained the name of 'Black Trackers.'

"Meet me to-morrow, at noon, at the gate in the lane. I will be there with one of the most expert of these 'Black Trackers,' and if there are really any grounds for the fears you have expressed to me, we shall then have the means to sift the matter to the bottom."

Johnson having gratefully accepted the superintendent's offer, met his friend and the Australian as arranged, on the following day at the gate in the lane. The Black Tracker was simply told that he was wanted to discover the whereabouts of a lost man, supposed to have passed somewhere near that spot. Thus instructed, the Black Tracker started off swiftly, trotting round in a circle. This he repeated several times, diminishing his circles as he went until he arrived at the gate. Here he paused, and commenced examining the gate, rail by rail, apparently without any effect, until he reached the top rail. Over this he passed his hand several times, as if searching for something. At last, with a cry of savage glee, he pulled at a splinter of wood, which he detached from the rail, and, holding it up in triumph to the witnesses, showed what they at once discovered to be a *human hair* sticking to the wood. Having handed this to the superintendent, he leaped over the gate and, closely followed by the others, again started off on his trotting walk. Very soon he increased his pace to a swift run, always keeping a circle, which he now increased as he went. After a time he stopped, called the others to approach, and then pointed out an indentation in the ground, and said "Man!" The impression was so slight that the Englishmen could scarcely make anything of it, and Johnson commenced to probe with his stick, thinking that something might be buried there, but the native shook his head, and again started off on a run, still following out his circles, which he extended till he had got almost out of sight of the others. Suddenly he stopped, and again beckoned them to approach. This time they found him on the edge of a pond, or, as the Australians call it, "a water hole." Once more he pointed to an indentation in the soft ground by the side of the pond, at the same time shaking his head and making his followers understand that he could do no more then, but, pointing to the sun, and then to the western horizon, he intimated in his expressive way that they must return to that spot when the sun was down, and that so far their search was ended. Finding they must conform to the native's strong will, they returned to Johnson's house, where they all remained till the evening, when the Australian made them understand that it was time to go back to the pond.

Arriving there, he threw himself on the ground, looked eagerly across the water, then rose up, clapped his hands, and made each of the party do as he had done, when, from the middle of the pond they saw arising a phosphorescent light, such as would be produced by decomposed animal matter beneath the water. Again they returned to Johnson's house, and the next morning means were found to drag the pond, from which was drawn the body of a man instantly recognized by Johnson as that of his friend Fisher, and bearing

unmistakable marks, showing that he had been cruelly murdered. The next course the friends took was to procure a warrant for the arrest of James on suspicion of being the murderer. After an inquest on the body, James was held for trial, but there was really no legal evidence against him, except the false statement he had made about Fisher's departure for England. The very strange story, however, which Johnson told the authorities, determined them to try another experiment. James was ordered to be removed from the court, and whilst the jury were absent considering their verdict, an official was sent to the prisoner to tell him that he had been found guilty of the murder of Fisher. Immediately upon receiving these tidings James said deliberately, "Then I may as well confess it at once, for I *did* murder Fisher as he sat on the gate of one of his fields. I then carried his body and sunk it in the water hole where it was found, and I am now glad it was found out, for I have known no peace since the deed was done." James was hanged on his own confession, but the real witness against him was one not yet admitted into courts of English jurisprudence - to wit, an inhabitant of that world beyond, to which the hand of the murderer had sent him.

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Paul J. Gaunt